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# California State Senate

SENATOR

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## **SB 837: Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2014** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Basic Questions:**

#### **What does the bill do?**

SB 837 provides all 4 year olds in California the chance to attend a high-quality, voluntary transitional kindergarten (TK) program designed to meet the particular learning and developmental needs of young learners. By expanding and improving TK, we can connect early learning with the K-12 grades, which are built upon the foundation established by a child's earliest learning experiences.

#### **Who are the authors and sponsors of SB 837?**

SB 837 is authored by Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and co-sponsored by Early Edge California and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson.

Joint authors are Senators Jim Beall (D-San Jose), Marty Block (D-San Diego), Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord), Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley), Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo), Mark Leno (D-San Francisco), Carol Liu (D-La Canada Flintridge), and Lois Wolk (D-Davis). The bill is co-authored by Assemblymember Rob Bonta (D-Alameda).

#### **How is TK proposed in SB 837 different from TK currently being implemented throughout California?**

Current TK is the first year of a two year kindergarten program for children who have their fifth birthday between September 2 and December 2, and is only available to one-quarter of California's 4 year olds in a given school year. SB 837 creates a new, developmentally appropriate kindergarten readiness grade level for all children who will have their fourth birthday on or before September 1.

**What is the timeline for implementation?**

Starting in the 2015-16 school year, the program is phased in over a 5-year period to allow: 1) districts and providers to build capacity to serve additional children; 2) existing preschool teachers to secure additional education and credentials; and 3) a gradual implementation in line with improving state budget projections.

**What is the minimum age for admittance to TK as proposed in SB 837?**

When the program is fully implemented in 2019-20, a child can be admitted if the child has his/her fourth birthday on or before September 1 of the 2019-20 school year, and each school year thereafter.

During the phase in period of implementation, which starts in the 2015-16 school year, a child can be admitted to a TK program at the beginning of the school year if he/she has his/her fifth birthday between the following dates:

- September 2, 2015 to February 1, 2016 for the 2015-16 school year
- September 2, 2016 to April 1, 2017 for the 2016-17 school year
- September 2, 2017 to June 1, 2018 for the 2017-18 school year
- September 2, 2018 to August 2, 2019 for the 2018-19 school year

**How is TK defined in SB 837?**

TK is defined as a “school-year long kindergarten readiness grade level that is age and developmentally appropriate” that will support all children in developing cognitive skills and social-emotional skills, and build upon existing high-quality programs.

**Must children attend TK under SB 837?**

No. TK is a voluntary program for all four-year-old children. As with kindergarten, parents can choose whether to enroll their children in TK.

**What role will families play in choosing a TK class for their child?**

Families can choose whether to enroll their children in TK.

SB 837 encourages parent choice by requiring school districts or charter schools to “allow, to the greatest extent possible, a parent of an eligible child to choose the transitional kindergarten that the eligible child attends.” Where districts have open enrollment policies and allow for inter-district transfers in grades K-12, we expect that at full implementation they would extend similar choice options for TK.

**Questions about cost and savings:****How much will the program cost?**

Based on a fiscal analysis by the California Department of Education, the program would cost an average of \$300 million additional dollars each year during the five-year phase-in period, for a total cost of \$1.46 billion at full implementation in the 2019-20 school year.

**How will it be paid for?**

TK for all will be paid for with Proposition 98 dollars. The amount of Prop. 98 dollars dedicated to public education would grow with the implementation of SB 837, by an amount more than sufficient to fund the cost of the program, as explained further below.

**Will this new program crowd out existing programs under Prop. 98?**

According to a fiscal analysis of SB 837 by the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), and based on the most recent LAO forecast for state revenue growth, SB 837 would not crowd out existing programs under Prop. 98. The new TK enrollments would drive increases in the Prop. 98 minimum funding guarantee by about \$2.2 billion at full implementation in 2019-20. In other words, Prop. 98 funding for schools would be \$2.2 billion higher with SB 837 than it would be without it.

LAO has also calculated that this increase in the Prop. 98 guarantee would be more than sufficient to fund the costs of the additional TK students served by school districts as a result of SB 837. This means that the increased TK costs would not "crowd out" other Proposition 98 programs.

LAO forecasts that starting in 2015-16 (year 1 of SB 837 implementation) and extending through full implementation in 2019-20, Prop. 98 will be in either "test 2" or "test 3" for the purposes of calculating the size of the minimum school funding guarantee. In both of these "tests", enrollment is a primary factor in determining the amount of funds obligated to schools under the guarantee.

Individual school districts will have differing local enrollment trends, with some experiencing enrollment dips and others increases. For those in declining enrollment situations, SB 837 could soften or eliminate declining enrollment in future years.

There is always a possibility that the economy could take a turn for the worse, in which case the entire state budget suffers. But even if this were to occur, the Prop. 98 minimum funding guarantee would still likely be higher with SB 837 than without it. The Legislature and Governor are engaged in serious discussion about establishing rainy day funds to act as an important buffer during future downturns.

**What are the likely short term savings?**

Savings from lower grade retention rates are estimated to be \$150 million a year at full implementation, or 15% lower than the current estimated expense of retention during kindergarten through 3rd grade. Special education costs are estimated to be reduced by 10% at full implementation, or \$860 million a year.

**What are the likely long term savings?**

A recent report by Fight Crime Invest in Kids estimates California would save \$1.1 billion a year in prison costs (beginning 20 years after full implementation). University of Chicago Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman states that overall investment in high quality preschool results in a 7 to 10% per year return on investment.

**Does SB 837 reduce federal or state funding for existing child care and development programs?**

No. SB 837 states: "Transitional kindergarten funds shall supplement, and not supplant, federal and state funding for existing child care and development programs." The goal of this legislation is to expand

children's access to full-day, full year services and we are engaged in ongoing budget discussions around funding.

### **Questions about quality:**

#### **Does SB 837 require TK teachers to hold a teaching credential?**

At full implementation, yes. During the five-year implementation period, time is provided for teachers to earn that credential.

- On or before July 1, 2015 all transitional kindergarten classes would be taught by a teacher who holds at a minimum an associate degree, a professional plan for a baccalaureate degree with 24 units in early childhood and a teaching credential by July 1, 2019.
- On or before July 1, 2019 all transitional kindergarten classes would be taught by a credentialed teacher with 24 units of early childhood education.

At full implementation, associate teachers would hold an AA degree with 24 units in early childhood education. As with lead teachers, associate teachers would have the 5-year phase-in period to achieve those higher credentials.

#### **What is the student-teacher ratio for TK as proposed in SB 837?**

10-to-1. TK class sizes are limited to 20 children, with one teacher and one associate teacher in each classroom.

#### **Will standards be available for transitional kindergarten as proposed in SB 837?**

Yes. TK standards will be adopted by the State Board of Education and be based on the current state Preschool Learning Foundations. Until statewide standards are adopted, the existing Preschool Learning Foundations will be used for content standards.

### **District/Charter School/TK Provider Questions:**

#### **Must districts and charter schools offer TK as proposed in SB 837?**

Yes. Each school district and charter school that offers kindergarten must offer TK for all four year olds. School districts are encouraged to contract with existing preschool providers to expand high-quality TK for all 4 year olds.

#### **How many children are expected to enroll?**

Based on the experience of other states that already provide universal preschool, about 70% of eligible 4 year olds are anticipated to enroll once the program is fully established.

#### **Must school districts find space on all existing elementary school campuses for TK?**

Not necessarily. SB 837 allows local districts and charters to contract with non-profits and private providers to provide TK, so long as the program meets required quality standards. Private providers would have to provide the program in facilities that meet existing standards for serving 4-year-olds

**If private providers contract with local school districts to provide TK, do they become public employers?**

No. The teachers will be employed by the organization that is providing transitional kindergarten. The legislation says “for purposes of establishing collective bargaining rights for employees of a private local provider of transitional kindergarten pursuant to the terms of an agreement with the administering school district or charter school, as a condition of the receipt of funds, the private local provider shall be considered a public school employer.”

**How many years can a district claim apportionment for TK as proposed in SB 837?**

For apportionment purposes, a district or charter school may not include the attendance of students for more than two years in kindergarten or for more than two years in a combination of transitional kindergarten and kindergarten.

**What about facilities?**

Districts’ facilities needs will vary widely, and SB 837 provides options for meeting them: 1. By making TK facilities eligible for funding under the state bond program and 2. By allowing districts to contract with private providers in facilities that already meet Title 22 requirements. Approximately 300 districts have bond authority remaining.

The California Debt Investment Advisory Commission (CDIAC) recently reported that California school and community college districts have \$37 billion in authorized but unissued bonding authority locally. As local property values rebound post-recession, some of this authority may be available to districts to address TK facilities needs.

**Will the state collect data about children in TK?**

Yes. As for students in grades K through 12, data about student participation in TK would be reported via CALPADS, with safeguards to protect individual student privacy.

**What does this mean for Common Core implementation?**

SB 837 will help prepare 4 year olds to be ready to learn and succeed in kindergarten and beyond with transitional kindergarten curriculum frameworks and instructional materials that are developmentally appropriate for young learners, but aligned to the new Common Core State Standards.

The proposed legislation requires districts to use the Common Core-aligned Preschool Learning Foundations and kindergarten education content standards until Common Core-aligned statewide standards are adopted by the State Board of Education for TK.

**How does SB 837 impact private providers of the State Preschool?**

By providing TK for all 4-year olds, and at the same time preserving existing funds available to provide “wrap around” ECE to low-income 4-year olds, SB 837 increases services to this age group and provides significant opportunity to current private preschool providers to operate on multiple levels: as TK providers through contract with school districts; as providers of “wrap around” education and care for low-income 4 year olds during the part of the day not covered by TK; and as providers of the state preschool program for increased numbers of 3-year olds.

Currently, under New Jersey’s Abbott preschool program, school districts receive state funding and are encouraged to partner with private preschool providers or CBOs. The result has been 60% of 4-year olds served in a private setting.

**Does SB 837 use State Preschool Program or other existing child development funds to pay for TK?**

No. SB 837 provides \$1.4 billion in new Prop. 98 dollars for the TK program at full implementation. Of the \$400 million now dedicated to part-day State Preschool for 4 year olds, \$200 million would go to a consolidated Strong Start program (detailed in a “zero-to-3” bill to be introduced shortly), and \$200 million would go to provide full day-wrap around for low-income children in TK. The wrap around dollars would remain with state funded child development contractors.

**Questions about aspiring teachers and associate teachers:**

**Does the bill provide a career advancement pathway for current preschool teachers? Will there be any funding to support teachers as they obtain their higher qualifications?**

Yes. SB 837 asks the State Superintendent, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing and higher education institutions to develop a plan for teachers to meet the higher qualifications. School districts will receive an estimated \$6,300 per child, on average, in Average Daily Attendance (ADA), which would allow several different ways to support teachers in obtaining higher education. Discussions are ongoing for additional ways SB 837 could support teachers.

**What happens to teachers who have years of experience, but don’t have a teaching credential?**

The experience of teachers and staff working in state subsidized early education settings and programs is a valued component of providing care to California’s youngest learners. Discussions between the author’s office and bill sponsors and stakeholders is ongoing to explore options for the support of our early educators to obtain the necessary training and professional learning experiences to meet the TK standards proposed in SB 837. The intent of this bill is that TK teachers will be paid on par with their K-12 colleagues.